

# How Did Christianity Happen?

## The Contribution of Scot McKnight

McKnight responds to Crossley just as Casey responds to Bird; I.e., Evangelical responds to secularist as secularist responds to evangelical. And whilst Casey's response is aimed at Bird's actual ideas, McKnight seems more interested in portraying Jesus and the early Church as 'Emergents'. Indeed, while reading McKnight I couldn't escape the sensation that I was watching a scholar superimpose a quite modern (postmodern)(post-postmodern) view of the world and the Church on Jesus and his disciples.

McKnight's central interest seems to be the promotion of his 'Anawim Theology' rather than actually responding to Crossley. To be sure, he tosses the dog a bone in a few opening paragraphs but then immediately launches into his own agenda. He justifies this procedure by proclaiming 'It is easier to find fault with another scholar's statements ... than to write a compelling alternative. ... If I offer some critique of Crossley in what follows ... I have chosen more importantly to offer an alternative narrative to that provided by Crossley' (p. 171). Or, in preacher language- I've read the scripture but now I have no intention of talking about what it said, I want to talk about what I think.

However, McKnight is correct when he notes 'I would have liked to have seen him [Crossley] tip his hat at times to the outworkings of his own biases' (ibid.). And I would have liked to see McKnight engage Crossley rather than using his obvious disdain for his approach as a launching pad for his own – unacknowledged – agenda.

So, setting Crossley aside in the manner one places a recalcitrant child in the corner in 'time out' until he sees the error of his ways, McKnight moves on to his purpose- which is, to put it bluntly, to make Jesus and the Church seem very much like the sort of Church the emergent movement desires. McKnight has looked into the Historical Jesus Well and seen his own reflection.

He goes so far as to suggest that Luke 4:18-19 is the 'famous inaugural sermon of Jesus' (p. 174) and he doesn't even hesitate in saying it. As though we have in that passage the very words of Jesus himself and not Luke the theologian's! 'If this text is paradigmatic for Jesus...' he says, without realizing that it is in fact NOT paradigmatic for Jesus but for Luke!

He also implies that something as innocent as 'Blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me' is a bold and bright Christological claim from the very lips of Jesus. That is, to be charitable, quite a stretch indeed. He even implies that the posture of Jesus while he taught is weighted with Christological significance. '... He is the middle. He is the agent of God. (At the least, he believes this about himself, and his followers do too)' (p. 175). All that from the fact that Jesus sat in the middle of the group and taught them! That's no Christological claim- that's common rabbinic practice. Reading so much into it takes the evidence much too far. And while Crossley may not go far enough for my tastes, McKnight goes much too far.

Towards the end of his 'adopt my Anawim theology as the proper paradigm for understanding Jesus and the birth of the Church' he writes '... if the Gospels are the bioi of Jesus...' (p. 179). But, they aren't. The Gospels are sermons, not bioi.

He concludes, in good Emergent fashion- '... the kingdom vision of Jesus in the shape of a Church filled with Jews and Gentiles who loved God, loved others and lived life empowered by God's Spirit' (p. 182).

That's not Jesus' Kingdom Vision (whatever that is). That's McKnight's Kingdom Vision. The equation of the one with the other is far more biased than anything Crossley attempts.